**AP LITERATURE   
AT HOME ESSAY Quarter 1**

**For this essay, you will write on Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening.*  Choose a topic that focuses on some aspect of the novel and create a thesis statement that asserts your opinion (interpretation) about that topic.  Be clear in your thesis. It is the most important sentence in the essay because it provides the focus (and hopefully directs your organizational structure). A vague thesis usually leads to a blurry essay. This essay should be two-four typed pages. I will conference with you on rough drafts as you complete them, however the final essay is due OCTOBER 27th.**

**The Literary Essay -- Definition and Purpose:**

A literary essay interprets the meaning of a novel or play and analyzes how the author conveys this meaning. The essay focuses on an element of literature and studies **how** this element contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. A good literary essay does more than merely describe the theme of the book. Instead, the essay explores the nuances and depths of the book. Such an essay requires intellectual risk-taking and creativity. It argues a position—it *interprets* the text. A good literary essay is exciting to read and to write because it focuses on interesting details and opens up new ideas.

**General Procedure:**

The writer of a literary essay completes a close reading of the text, extracts significant details, and interprets their meaning. The writer synthesizes the information in an essay that presents a clear, convincing argument. Generally, consider the following:

1. Select an element that strikes your attention or arouses your curiosity: a recurring image, a minor character, an important scene, a symbolic object or place, etc. Collect every reference to this element that appears in the text.

2. Study the list of textual details to determine if a pattern exists. Think about how this element relates to the book’s theme. Ask yourself, “Why did the author do this?” Figure out the meaning.

3. Create a tentative thesis that identifies the literary element and states what it contributes to the book’s purpose.

4. Draft a three to four page essay that is well supported and convincing. Do not organize your paper around plot, but around ideas that develop your argument.

5. Conclude by clearly stating the relationship between the element you are studying and the overall meaning of the book. Then, move beyond the text. Examine the significance and relevance of the book. End with a forceful statement that leaves the reader thinking.

6. Such an essay requires no research. However, if you read a secondary source that influences your interpretation, be sure to document that source.

7. Use MLA format for the final draft. Use a proper heading.

***THE AWAKENING* ESSAY**

Create an introduction that sets up your thesis idea. Be sure to include the T.A.G. and at least one sentence of synopsis. **Specific work on introductions will be done in class the week of Oct. 18-21**.

**Use a STRONG, DEBATABLE thesis statement**

This “argument” of your paper is summed up in your ***thesis statement****.* This is comprised of one to three sentences in your essay that reveal the focus of your essay and provide the reader with a roadmap of sorts to guide them through your argument. A strong thesis will reveal an understanding of the complexity of the text (often a “both—and” type statement or an “although” structure). Check the wiki for more samples.

**A strong, debatable thesis statement has three components:**

1. WHAT –your claim about the text; the topic to be examined
2. *HOW* – the means by which the topic will be examined; such as: themes, literary devices, concepts, key images, etc. – you use these to prove your claim.
3. **SO WHAT** – the significance of your idea in terms of understanding the text as a whole. This must be debatable, i.e. somebody could potentially try to gather evidence to argue the opposite side to your thesis.

EXAMPLE: Although the novel seems to celebrate the potential for interracial understanding through the friendship of Huck and Jim, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ultimately suggests that racial hierarchies are unalterable. *The novel’s emphasis on the “adventures” that Tom Sawyer concocts to “free” Jim* emblematizes the unwillingness of Americans to veer away from the script of racial oppression.

Please note:

1.      The part of the thesis in plain text (Although the novel seems to celebrate….”) is a potential contradiction to your argument; a strong thesis often addresses a potential opposing viewpoint.

2.      A good thesis should address these three questions in some way. Most students have trouble answering the “so what?” question for their thesis; always be sure your thesis includes within it an answer to that question. Important: the answer to the “so what?” should not be a generalization “about the world we live in, or life in general”; it should be SPECIFIC and justify why and how your argument is significant to the novel.

**REMEMBER—A STRONG, DEBATABLE THESIS IS:**(These four points are from Jack Lynch’s “Getting an A on an English Paper”:http://newark.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/EngPaper/index.html)

**Argumentative.** It makes a case. That's the biggest difference between a *thesis* and a *topic* -- a topic is something like "Slavery in *Huck Finn*." That's not a case, only a general area. A *thesis*, on the other hand, makes a specific case, it tries to prove something. One way to tell a thesis from a topic: if it doesn't have an active verb, it's almost certainly still a topic.

**Controversial.** That doesn't mean something like "Abortionists should be shot" or "George W. Bush's election was illegitimate" -- it means that it has to be possible for an intelligent person to *disagree* with your thesis. If everyone agrees on first sight, your thesis is too obvious, and not worth writing about.

**Analytical, not evaluative.** A college (AP) English paper isn't the place to praise or blame works of literature: theses like "*Paradise Lost* is an enduring expression of the human spirit" or "*The Sound and the Fury* isn't successful in its choice of narrative techniques" aren't appropriate. That's the business of book reviewers. No need to give thumbs-up or thumbs-down; evaluate the work on its own terms.

**Specific.** It's not enough to deal in vague generalities. Some students want to write their paper on man and God, or on the black experience in the twentieth century. Both are far too nebulous to produce a good paper. Get your hands dirty with the text. [Note that if you can plug another book into your thesis, it’s probably too general.]

**Well supported.** That's the key to the rest of the paper after those first few paragraphs.

THINGS TO AVOID WHEN CRAFTING A STRONG, DEBATABLE THESIS:

**Avoid a thesis that strays from the text at hand and focuses on tangential issues.**

Bad Example: "**The same racism found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* underlies current day events such the Los Angeles Riots."** Note that this sentence is interesting and might come into a conclusion but cannot be the central focus for a paragraph, let alone an entire paper.

**Avoid a thesis that is overly general--be specific.**

Bad Examples: **"In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin shows how Edna is unhappy with her life."** A slightly more specific, but ultimately weak, thesis would be **"In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin critiques the social limitations placed women."** Yes, this is true but SO WHAT? What is the reason Chopin does this? What gender/power constructs is she specifically critiquing?

**Avoid a thesis that lists.**

Bad Example: **"Twain shows Huck's fallibility through irony, symbolism, and plot constructs."**Often, being this specific merely creates a facade of organization. Defining specific areas to examine is a good thing, however, these points need to be interconnected and ideas should develop from previous points. Lists tend to sever ideas from one another. In addition, the body of your paper will develop such points, so you don't need a complete table of contents here.

**Avoid moralizing in your thesis. Don't judge the text; discuss how the text judges its characters, situations and ideas.**

Example: **"Edna was too selfish when she committed suicide, and thus is not an admirable heroine."**  Another example: "**Because she couldn't make up her mind, Edna deserved what she got."** You are making value judgments here--you can argue these points, but not without showing how *the text* critiques its characters’ behaviors. Be aware at all times of your tone. When writing a literary analysis, your role is to interpret, to suggest, and to argue – not to condemn based on personal experience, nor to suggest that the author of the text is flawed in his/her thinking.

THE BODY OF THE ESSAY

In the body, cite selected events and passages from the text to support your thesis, but be careful not to summarize the novel.  We've all read it, so please don't re-tell the story. A strong claim tied to your thesis will help you avoid summary. As a general rule, for each sentence of evidence, you should use about two-to-three sentences of analysis.  Develop the body paragraphs fully (generally six to ten sentences) so that the facet of the thesis with which you are dealing will have a sense of thoroughness and completion.  Remember your pattern: claim, evidence, commentary –repeat as needed for each paragraph. Always be sure to close your paragraphs and to use transitions to your next point.

Remember that I don't want to know what **you** think about marriage, children, society's expectations of women, etc. Rather, I want you to **interpret** what Chopin is saying/revealing about the topic that you choose. Document the paper with the standard MLA documentation that is, with in-text citations and a works cited page if you use any outside sources beyond the text itself.  An in-text citation should take the following format within the paragraph of your essay:  
  
Chopin reveals Edna's relationship to her children in the following passage: "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (63). If you don't use the signal phrase (Chopin reveals), then include the author's name in the parenthesis: (Chopin 63).

For this assignment, feel free to use outside sources but only scholarly criticism of the novel. You may use print sources, or you may use online sources; however, make sure that the sources you use are scholarly. I don't want random websites devoted to Kate Chopin, ones that can be created by any fan of her work or Spark notes, Wikipedia, etc. In addition, DO NOT use biographical material in your paper. You are to focus on the text. Analyze and interpret it, not the writer's life or even the historical context unless it specifically speaks to support of your claim.

Be sure to create a title for your paper. The title should not be Chopin's title; rather, it should be something that relates to your thesis statement. Don't put your title in quotation marks, and don't underline it.

**Format of the Paper**

Your essay should be typed and double-spaced. Use MLA FORMAT: On the upper **left** hand side of the first page, include your name, instructor name, the name of the course, the date. On the second and succeeding pages, in the upper **right** hand corner, include your last name, followed by the page number: Smith 2, Smith 3. Don't use "p" or "page" in front of the number.

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Some Topics to Consider

1.    After Edna Pontellier's awakening, she envisions herself as an artist of sorts.  She has a modest studio, she paints, and she even earns money from her work.  During one of her later visits to Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment, Edna hears from the pianist that the artist "must possess the courageous soul . . . [one] that dares and defies" (Chopin 115).  Argue that Edna Pontellier is (or is not) up to the artist's struggle in a bourgeois society, that indeed she has (or lacks) the courage to dare and defy.

2.    At one point, Edna Pontellier says to Madame Ratignolle that "'I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself'" (Chopin 97).  Given the events at the end of the novel, argue that Edna Pontellier's actions do not support her contention to her friend, that indeed Edna has given up herself--physically and psychologically.

3.    Chopin's novel has often been viewed as a satiric view of upper middle class society, a society best represented by Madame Ratignolle, who is the "mother woman" of the author's vituperative description (Chopin 51).  Through Edna, Chopin goes on to say that Adele Ratignolle's life with her husband is "an appalling and hopeless ennui."  Yet one could argue that the novel actually endorses the lifestyle and beliefs of this bourgeois society.  Argue that this is--or is not--so.

4.  Or, feel free to use any of the topics we discussed in class or if none of these topics appeals to you, create your own, *but ask me for approval before you write on it.*